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NOTES ON GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION

Clelia rustica (Jan, 1863) (Serpentes: Dipsadidae): Distribution extension

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ABSTRACT: A new record of the snake *Clelia rustica* is reported for the province of Neuquén in northwestern Patagonia, extending the distribution by more than 200 km north from previous records; it was known before only from the southernmost regions of the province.

The genus *Clelia* contains 13 species, five of which occur in a variety of habitats in Argentina (Scott *et al.* 2006). *Clelia rustica* (Cope 1878) was described from "Argentina" and it is widely distributed along northern and central areas of the country reaching central-east Chubut province in the south as well as southern Brazil and Uruguay; however, most voucher specimens have been collected along the lower Paraná and Uruguay River basins and in eastern Tucumán province (Scott *et al.* 2006). Unique specimens have been cited for Chubut (Atlantic coast, Scrocchi and Viñas 1990), La Pampa (Tiranti and Avila 1997), Mendoza (Giraudo and Arzamendia 1997) and Río Negro (Atlantic coast, Scrocchi and Viñas 1990) provinces. The southernmost citation is on the Atlantic coast of San Jose Gulf in Chubut province (Daciuk and Miranda 1980). Marcus *et al*. (2000) extended the distribution further south, to the lower Chubut River at 43° S but no voucher specimens have been cited in any formal publication. In the western region of Patagonia, only two specimens have been cited from ecotonal environments between Monte and Patagonian Steppe along Limay and Collon Cura rivers basin in southern Neuquén (Figure 1; Christie 1998).

On 14 December 2010, a recently killed, juvenile male *C. rustica* (450 mm snout–vent length, 502 mm total length) was collected on Provincial Road 26, 10 km N Loncopué town (38°02'00" S, 70°41'00" W, 1100 m), Loncopué Department, Neuquén Province, northwestern Patagonia, Argentina (Figure 1). The record reported here represents the third record for the province, but it is the first voucher specimen record for central Neuquén province, first for the Neuquén river basin, and the first for Loncopue department. Despite previous records in Neuquén Province, this specimen was found in a typical Patagonian Steppe area where *Mulinum spinosum* is recognized to be the dominant shrub. This new record also represents the highest collection point for this species (1100 m), usually found below 700 m, and the area is almost on the slope of the Andes Mountains. Additionally,

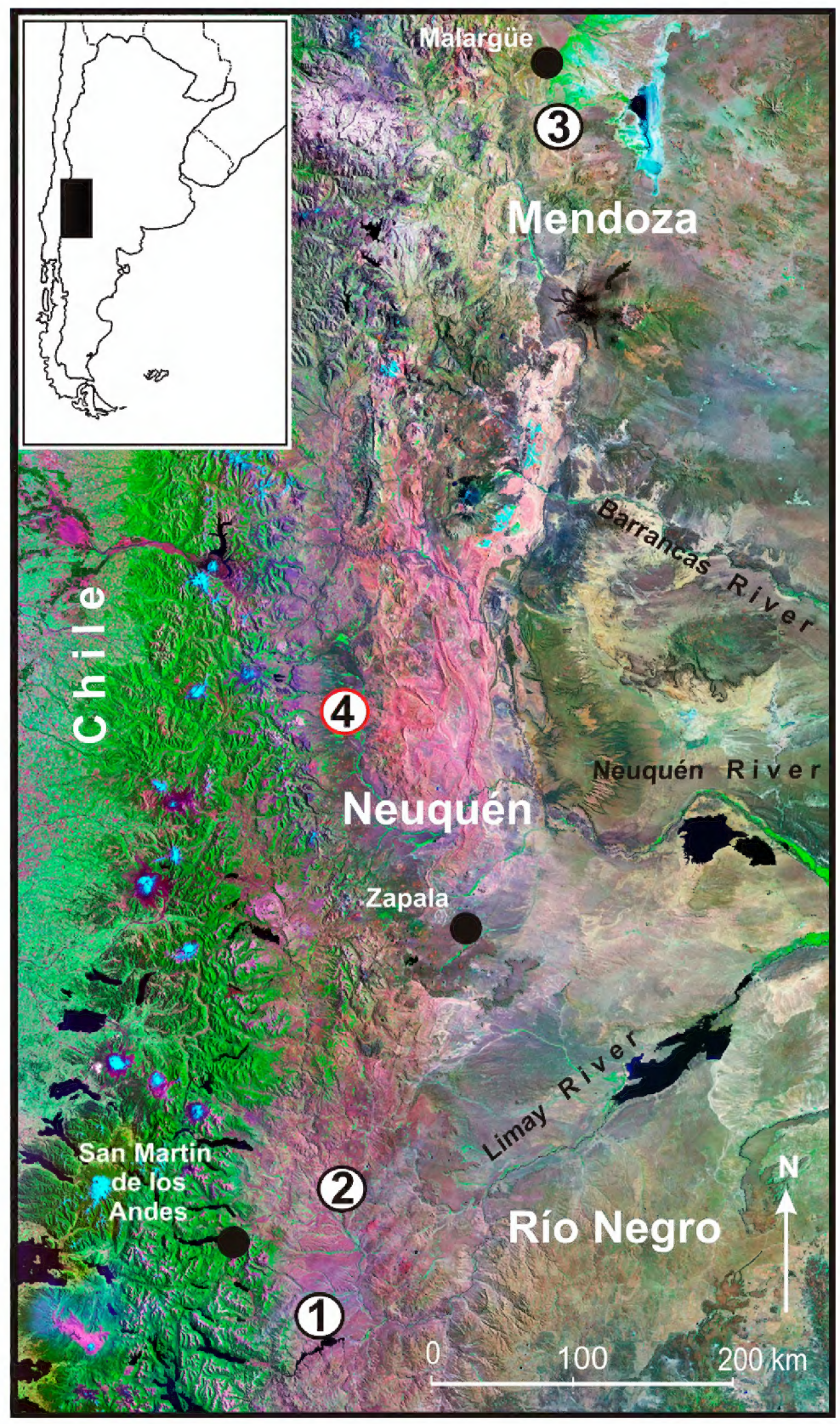

FIGURE 1. Map of the new locality of *Clelia rustica*. Symbols: white circles, literature records; red circle: new record. Localities: 1 and 2, Southern Neuquén province (Christie 1998); 3, Southern Mendoza province (Giraudo and Arzamendia 1997); and 4, Central Neuquén province.

this new record extends the species distribution 218.8 km north of the previous recognized localities (Christie 1998), representing a significant geographic extension in Neuquén. The voucher specimen is deposited in the Herpetological Collection LJAMM-CNP, Centro Nacional Patagónico (CENPAT-CONICET), Puerto Madryn (Chubut), Argentina, under the number LJAMM-CNP 13966.

Studies related to the geographic distribution of Argentinian snakes, specifically in the poorly known southern regions, are essential for the conservation of these unique vertebrates, especially considering that many snakes species are in low population density and then very difficult to find; the majority are known from few localities and usually suitable habitats in Neuquén province are along rivers increasingly destroyed by dams and water reservoirs.

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